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ABSTRACT

The document describes a research project studying the effects of using popular music in a high school contemporary U.S. history course. The hypothesis was to ascertain whether popular music can increase student interest and performance in the social studies. Two sections of senior high school students were studied. Section I, the control group, was taught using the traditional lecture-discussion method, while the second section, the experimental group, listened to and analyzed popular music relating to topics such as aging, assassination, civil rights, crime, drugs, death, ecology, nuclear power, Vietnam, the women's movement, and power. Both sections studied readings from a history text, had the same teacher, and met for five weeks. The students were pretested for intellectual ability and pre- and posttested for attitude and subject matter knowledge. Findings showed no statistically significant difference in gain in attitude toward history and gain in subject matter knowledge between the two groups. However the means of the gain-scores were greater for the experimental group in both attitude and knowledge. The author concludes that, contrary to what teachers frequently feel, using class time to listen to and analyze popular music relating to historical topics did not reduce the students' knowledge of the standard subject matter. (CK)

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THE EFFECT OF THE TEACHING TECHNIQUE OF USING POPULAR MUSIC UPON STUDENTS' ATTITUDE TOWARD HISTORY AND SUBJECT MATTER KNOWLEDGE

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The traditional use of the textbook and the lecture-discussion approach toward teaching United States history is a popular mode of instruction. History teachers use this method to insure that all standard topics are covered and the students are exposed to all of the standard subject matter knowledge. Yet for United States history, and other areas of the social studies, to be a meaningful subject for high school students, other methods of instruction might be employed by the classroom teacher. One teaching method which might increase the interest of students is the use of popular music as a partial replacement for the traditional teaching method.

Studies concerning the use of popular music as a means for teaching contemporary United States history to secondary school students are relatively few in number. The review of the literature reveals a general attitude among some educators that popular music could serve as a supplement to teaching not only United States history but other social studies as well. Basically there are three reasons for the lack of hard research in this area. First, rock music, which is the popular music of today, is a relatively new social phenomenon. Its beginnings date back to the early 1950's. Second, there is little expertise among many educators on the subject of this popular music. Third, there is a feeling among many educators that this popular music has no place in the classroom.

Although writers such as Newsome (1979) point out there has been little or no hard scientific research concerning the use of popular music in the classroom, these educators have proposed programs of study in the social studies which would make use of popular music as a supplement to current methods used by teachers. These researchers find that the greatest advantage of using popular music in the classroom is that it attracts the student's attention. Hirsch (1971), in his survey of Michigan's high school

students, revealed that only one percent of the students expressed a dislike for popular, or rock, music. Hoffer (1964) said that if students were interested the teacher need "only open the door of learning so that interest may be satiated." Ralph (1973) continued the argument by stating that rock music was an accurate indication of what young people were thinking, and the educator's involvement with it was a necessity and not a matter of personal preference.

In some ways today's popular music is different from music in any other historical time period. Cooper (1979) gave three reasons why the music of today is different. These three reasons are: (1) commercial distribution and radio broadcasting have created a vast listening audience, (2) the technical advances made in music instruments and musical production, and (3) the quality of the lyrics themselves. He felt that popular music should provide a field for "classroom experimentation."

From the review of the limited literature concerning the use of popular music for classroom instruction, two points can be made. First, some educators have seen a need to improve classroom instruction and envision popular music as one means for creating greater student interest. Second, more concrete research should be done to find if popular music, in fact, can increase student interest and performance in the social studies.

Popular Music for a United States History Class

A teaching method, which used a great amount of popular music, was planned for implementation in a class of recent United States history. To implement this teaching, the plans were for the students to be given reading assignments from a standard United States history text. This would be supplemented by popular music which emphasized certain topics in recent United States history. A listing of the topics and the songs to be used are given in Table I.

TABLE I
TOPICS AND POPULAR SONGS

Aging	
Father and Sons	Cat Stevens
Treat her Gently--Lonely Old People	Wings
When I'm 64	Beatles
Assassination	
Abraham, Martin, and John	Dion
He Was a Friend of Mine	Byrds
Long Time Gone	Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young
Black Movement-Civil Rights	
Alabama	Neil Young
Black Boys-White Girls	Hari Album
Blowin' in the Wind	Bob Dylan
Oxford Town	Bob Dylan
Southern Man	Neil Young
Sweet Home Alabama	Lynard Skynard
We Shall Overcome	Pete Seeger
Crime-Drugs	
Cocaine	Jackson Browne
Don't Bogart Me	Easy Rider Album
Happiness is a Warm Gun	Beatles
Little Help from my Friends	Beatles
Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds	Beatles
Mayrowanna	Pete Seeger
Midnight Rambler	Rollin Stones
Mothers Little Helper	Rollin Stones
Pills	Do Didley
Saturday Night Special	Lynard Skynard
Sister Morphine	Rollin Stones
The Acid Queen	Who
White Rabbit	Jefferson Airplane
Death	
Dancing with Mr. D.	Rollin Stones
Sleep's Dark and Silent Gate	Jackson Browne
Ecology	
A Day in the Life of a Tree	Beach Boys
Air	Hari Album
Don't Go Near the Water	Beach Boys
Rhymes and Reason	John Denver
The Ecology Song	Steve Stills
Where Do the Children Play	Cat Stevens
Education	
Born in a Prison	John Lennon/Yoko Ono
School Days	Chuck Berry

Lyndon Johnson

Initials	Hair Album
Superbird	Country Joe and the Fish

Mobile Society

California Dreaming	Mamas and the Papas

Nuclear Holocaust

A Hard Rains Gonna Fall	Bob Dylan
Talking WWII BLUES	Bob Dylan

Nuclear Power

No Nikes Concert	Benefit Album
Plutonium is Forever	John Hall
Power	Doobie Brothers
Wooden Ships	David Crosby

Poverty

In the Ghetto	Mac Davis
Lost, Lonely, and Wretched	Joan Baez

Prison Reform

Attica State	John Lennon
Life in Prison	Byrds

Religion

The Christian Life	Byrds
Turn, Turn, Turn	Byrds

Space Race-Future

Mr. Spaceman	Byrds
Rocket Man	Elton John
Starship	Jefferson Airplane
2000 Light Years from Now	Rolling Stones
2000 Man	Rolling Stones

Vietnam

Alice's Restaurant	Arlo Guthrie
Ballad of the Green Beret	Barry Sadler
Bring Them Home	Pete Seeger
Chicago	Graham Nash
Give Peace a Chance	Joe Cocker/Leon Russell
Handsome Johnny	Richie Havens
I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag	Phil Ochs
Last Train to Nuremberg	Pete Seeger
Ohio	Crosby, Stills, Nash. and Young
Okie from Muscogee	Merle Haggard
Uncle Ho	Pete Seeger
Universal Soldier	Buffy St. Marie

Women's Movement

A Woman	Sweet Honey on the Rock
Cook of the House	Wings
I Am Woman	Helen Reddy
Lazy Woman	Bo Didley
Woman Is the Nigger of the World	John Lennon/Yoko Ono

Youth Movement

For What It's Worth	Buffalo Springfield
Get Together	Jessie Colin Young
Revolution # 9	Beatles
San Francisco	Scott McKenzie
Volunteers	Jefferson Airplane

Research Procedures

In order to determine the results that the classroom teaching technique, which used a great amount of popular music, had upon students' interest in the subject matter and knowledge of the subject matter, a study was conducted in the spring of 1980 at South Cobb High School, Austell, Georgia. South Cobb High School is located in Cobb County, Georgia, which is a part of the metropolitan Atlanta area. In the spring of 1980, the school had a student population of approximately 1,200 students. The majority of the students came from middle class homes. Their parents were employed throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area.

The study used two sections of senior high school students enrolled in classes in recent United States history. One section of the study was taught using the lecture-discussion method while the other section used a great amount of popular music to reinforce the study of history. Both the experimental class and the control class were drawn from the total number of recent United States history classes taught at South Cobb High School. Both classes met for fifty minutes during each school day. The experimental class met for the first hour of the school day while the control

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class met for the second hour of the school day. Both groups had the same teacher. The experimental process lasted for a five-week period of time. The control group was taught by the traditional textbook and discussion-lecture method of teaching. The experimental group was taught by a method of listening to and analyzing various popular songs which illustrated points of social, economic, and political history of the past thirty years.

The experimental group was given weekly reading assignments from the textbook used by both groups. The textbook used was A People and a Nation which is published by Harper and Row. In conjunction with the reading assignments, the experimental group students were issed a lyric booklet which had been prepared by the instructor. This booklet contained those songs which illustrated the particular points to be studied in each daily lesson. A brief explanation of each song's lyric, as it related to the reading assignment, was given by the instructor. The song would then be played for the students so that they could hear the song as well as see the words.

The study of particular events or points of interest to the students came from the class discussions. The students were allowed the freedom to explore topics through questions to the teacher, suggested reading from the teacher or the class members, exchange of personal knowledge with the members of the class, and the investigation of the lyrics of popular songs not discussed in the classroom itself. Few restrictions were placed on the students. All questions were answered. The students were encouraged to explore the music and its meaning. Because of the interest in the subject matter, no extra assignments were required beyond the textbook readings.

In order to determine if the two classes were matched evenly in intellectual ability, the Henmon-Nelson Test of Mental Ability was given to the students of each group. A t-test was computed for differences between the mean scores of the two groups.

TABLE II

MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND t-VALUE

Control Group		Experimental Group		
Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value
93.8	11.07	102.57	14.13	2.20*

*Significant at .05 level.

Early in the first week of the study, "Remmer's Any School Subject Survey," which is one of the Purdue Master Attitude Scales, was given to both groups of students as an attitude pretest. Later in the same week, an achievement test for contemporary history was given to both groups of students as a pretest for subject matter knowledge. This test was booklet A from Harper and Row's publication, A People and a Nation.

At the end of the experimental period, "Remmer's Any School Subject Survey" was given as an attitude posttest. Mean gaines in attitude, as demonstrated by these scores, were calculated. A t-test was computed for the differences between the mean gain-scores of the two groups. Table III gives the results of this test.

TABLE III

GAIN-SCORE MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATION, AND t-VALUE

Control Group		Experimental Group		
Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-Value
.3762	1.101	.6789	1.147	.85

The t-value of .85 was not significant at the .05 level. Even though the gain-score mean for the experimental group was greater than that of the control group, it was concluded that there was no significant difference in gain in attitude toward history between the two groups.

Because there was a significant difference in the mean scores of the two groups on the mental ability test, an analysis of co-variance test was conducted on the gains in subject matter knowledge from the pretest to the posttest. Mental ability was used as the co-variant. Means of these gain-scores are given in Table IV.

TABLE IV

GAIN-SCORE MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE
OF UNITED STATES HISTORY

Control Group	Experimental Group
Mean	Mean
14.48	18.32

The analysis of co-variance is given in Table V.

TABLE V

ANALYSIS OF CO-VARIANCE

Source of Variation	S.S.	DF	Mean Square	F	P
Mental Group	372.847	1	342.847	5.146	.029
Group	35.940	1	35.940	.496	.486
Error	2680.613	37	72.449		

The F-value of .496 on group was not significant at the .05 level. Although the gain-score mean of the experimental group was greater than that of the control group, it was concluded that there was no significant difference in the subject matter knowledge between the two groups.

Discussion

There was no statistically significant difference found in gain in attitude toward history and gain in subject matter knowledge between the experimental group, which spent a great amount of class time in the study of popular music which related to themes being studied in recent United States history, and the control group, which used the lecture-discussion method. However, in both the areas of attitude and subject matter knowledge, the means of the gain-scores were greater for the experimental group. Frequently, social studies teachers feel that when classroom time is used in teaching methods which do not carefully cover in detail the textbook and all topics for study the students will suffer in not having the standard academic knowledge for that subject. The results of this study indicate that the use of classroom time in listening to and analyzing music which related to certain historical topics being studied did not reduce the students' knowledge of the standard subject matter.

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